

HURRICANE MITCH RECONSTRUCTION UPDATE



USAID/Nicaragua Hurricane Mitch Reconstruction Program

(U.S. Millions of Dollars)	\$103.6
Public Health	30.6
Economic Reactivation	53.5
Disaster Mitigation	6.6
Education	4.5
Municipal Infrastructure	2.9
Transparency and Accountability	1.0
Food Aid	4.5



Departments of Nicaragua
Affected by Hurricane Mitch

BLUE BUS BRINGS HEALTH MESSAGE AND FUN TO COMMUNITIES

Cuatro Esquinas, Nicaragua— Members of this rural community, located in the northwestern department of Chinandega, were busy since early morning cleaning up the neighborhood and decorating floats. By the time the Blue Bus rolled in, the whole town was assembled, anxiously waiting for the activities to begin.

The Blue Bus is a unique effort to train community members in better health and sanitation practices. As part of USAID's \$2 million Blue Star hygiene campaign, designed and implemented by Johns Hopkins University, the Blue Bus travels to communities promoting healthy practices through games and contests and videos. The activities, which include latrine and hand washing contests, prizes for the



The Blue Bus is part of USAID's \$2 million Blue Star water and sanitation campaign, designed and implemented by Johns Hopkins University in Hurricane Mitch affected communities

cleanest homes and a parade of floats displaying hygiene messages, last well into the evening.

However, USAID's health and hygiene campaign begins weeks before the arrival of the Blue Bus. Through USAID's private volunteer organization partners, hygiene workshops are held in the communities that will be visited by the Blue Bus. Members of the community are trained as water and sanitation monitors and educational materials are distributed to neighborhood schools to promote the campaign. A number of commissions are formed to plan the activities for the day of the Blue Bus visit, to select the winners for the cleanest homes contest and to continue the cleanliness program in the community long after the Blue Bus visit.

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The Blue Bus promotes healthy practices through activities like this contest that instructs residents in proper use and maintenance of latrines.

BLUE BUS BRINGS HEALTH MESSAGE...

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Since the Blue Star program began last year, the Blue Bus has visited more than 100 communities in areas affected by Hurricane Mitch, bringing the water and sanitation campaign to more than 27,000 people.

Many communities confirm that the Blue Bus visits have had a positive impact on hygiene practices.

In the northern city of Ocotal, the Blue Bus visit prompted town officials to establish a municipal ordinance on cleanliness. And at the El Socorro School in the community of Palacaguina teachers reported that students' personal hygiene improved after receiving toothbrushes, toothpaste, soap and combs, (items, they said, that many parents could not afford to buy), distributed during the Blue Bus visit.

The Blue Bus is also participating in an emergency plan developed by the Ministry of Health and USAID's Prosalud project to combat a diarrhea epidemic in the department of Jinotega. The Blue Bus visited communities most affected by the diarrhea outbreak in an effort to reduce the number of cases by teaching residents proper hand washing, safe techniques for water handling, appropriate disposal of excrement and maintenance and use of latrines.

On the day of the visit to Cuatro Esquinas, the cleanliness verification commission visited each of the houses in the community, inspecting the house, patio, well, latrine and washing area to make a



Community members actively participate in Blue Bus activities designing floats with a health message.

list of people who would receive prizes for the cleanest household. Meanwhile, groups of neighbors, organized by districts of the community, put the final touches on their float entrant.

Concepcion Rivas said her group from district three put together their colorful oxen-towed float, decorated with balloons, coconuts and palm fronds, in about an hour. The purpose of the float, she said, was to encourage cleanliness in the community. A group of 15 residents worked on district two's float, covered with balloons, coconuts, plantain fruits and sanitation messages.

The judges, USAID's health officer and a representative from USAID's Environmental Health Project had a hard time picking a winner and decided to give prizes to all the floats.

Confirming that decision, said Cuatro Esquinas resident Gloria Noemi Munguia: "This is a Blue Star community, a clean community."



A commission of community representatives select the winners of the cleanest household contest.

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